



Rio Grande National Forest



Visitor Information Guide

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FREE



Welcome to the Rio Grande National Forest

The Rio Grande National Forest (RGNF) spans over 1.8 million acres in a forested ring around the San Luis Valley in south-central Colorado. From the high peaks of the Sangre de Cristo Range to rugged canyons and ancient calderas, the Forest offers year-round opportunities for sightseeing and abundant recreational activities. Whether you follow the Continental Divide, fish the Rio Grande, explore miles of roads and trails, or find the perfect camp spot, there is something for everyone.

Conejos Peak Ranger District

The southern District on the RGNF boasts abundant recreation opportunities, such as hiking or horseback riding in the South San Juan Wilderness or camping and fishing at Trujillo Meadows Reservoir. This area includes the towns of Antonito, Platoro, and La Jara where the Conejos Peak District Office is located. This district borders New Mexico.

Divide Ranger District

This District is located in the middle of the RGNF and includes the Del Norte, South Fork, and Creede areas. From skiing at Wolf Creek to hiking along the Continental Divide trail, or fishing the Rio Grande, there are many recreational opportunities to experience. Stop by or call the Divide Ranger District Office in Del Norte to plan your trip!

Saguache Ranger District

Backpacking in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains or hiking and fishing along the Middle Creek Trail are just a couple of recreation options on the northern District of the RGNF. Visit the towns of Saguache and Crestone while you're in the area. The Saguache District Office is located just outside the town of Saguache on State Hwy 114.

Message from Dan Dallas, Forest Supervisor

Welcome to your Rio Grande National Forest! I invite you to peruse these pages and make your plan to get out and enjoy this gem of a Forest in the remote southcentral Colorado mountains. I am proud to live here and be a part of the 117-year legacy of caring professionals that provide stewardship of these amazing lands. Clean water, stunning views, and abundant recreational opportunities await. Enjoy your Rio Grande National Forest experience!

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Maps

Many maps and publications are available to provide visitors with information about the Rio Grande National Forest. The RGNF covers 1.8 million acres and is divided into three Ranger Districts. These smaller units make some aspects of forest management easier.

Visitor information maps are available for purchase at District offices or as digital geo-referenced maps through the Avenza app. These maps show roads and highways, cities, bodies of water, recreation sites, campgrounds, trails, private and public land designations, and more. Free Motor Vehicle Use Maps (MVUMs) show motorized roads, trails, and seasonal closures. MVUMs are available at our District offices, online, and are free to download through the Avenza app. Learn more at:

www.fs.usda.gov/main/riogrande/maps-pubs

Visit your app store to download the Avenza app.

Then find maps through Avenza by searching *Rio Grande NF* or scanning the QR codes below.



Divide
District East



Conejos Peak
District East



Saguache
District East



Divide District
West

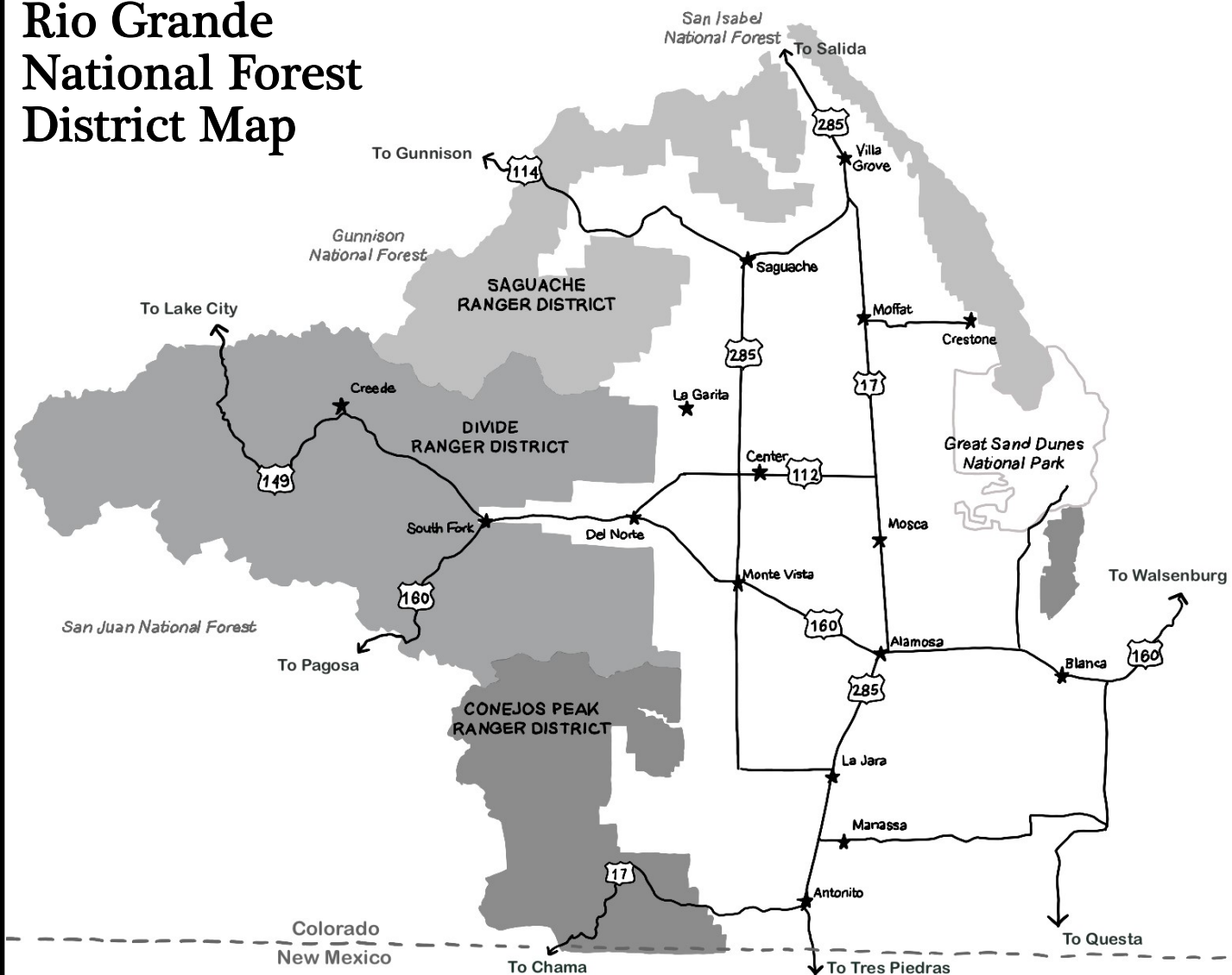


Conejos Peak
District West



Saguache
District West

Rio Grande National Forest District Map



Know Before You Go

Plan ahead and prepare:

- Be familiar with rules and regulations on the Rio Grande National Forest (RGNF). Pay attention to signage and check the Alerts page on the website.
- Be prepared with supplies and equipment.

Travel and choosing a campsite:

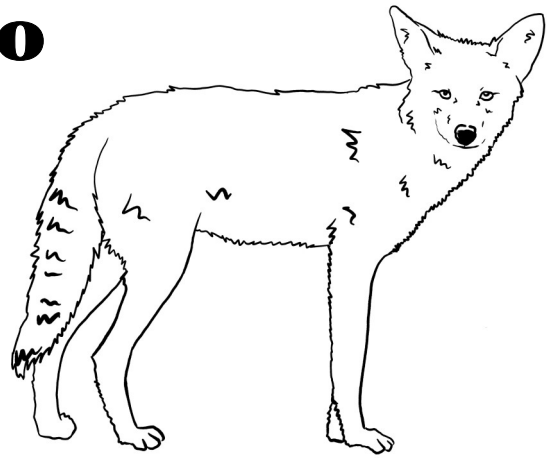
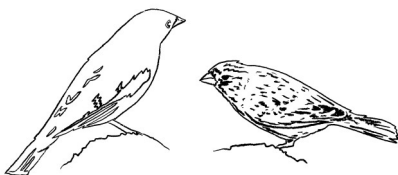
- Motorized travel is allowed only on designated roads and trails. Obtain a Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM) from District offices or online before heading out.
- Roads and areas may be closed by seasonal road closures and Special Orders (see page 18 for more info).
- Vehicles must stay within 300 feet of a designated road when dispersed camping without causing resource damage.
- When dispersed camping, look for an area that has already been impacted, like an established site, to avoid further damaging soils and vegetation.
- Camp on durable surfaces, like sand or gravel.
- Camp at least 150 feet from water sources.
- Camping on the Rio Grande National Forest is limited to 14 days in any 30 day period.

Dispose of waste properly:

- Pack out all of your trash.
- For your backcountry toilet needs, dig a 6-8 inch deep hole at least 150 feet from water. Cover the hole with soil before you leave.
- Toilet paper must be thrown in the trash. Do not bury it.
- Dump sewage from trailers and motorhomes at designated dump stations.
- Do not use soap or wash dishes or clothing in streams or lakes. Even biodegradable soap can not be used directly in bodies of water.

Respect other visitors and neighbors:

- Minimize noise, be nice, and say hi!
- Respect private landowners and don't trespass on private property.
- There are many uses on the Forest - you may see people doing different activities than yours.



Respect wildlife:

- Don't feed, interact with, or disturb wildlife.
- Be aware that black bears are in this area.
- Store food, cooking utensils, and trash properly with bear-resistant containers or inside a hard-sided vehicle or camper. You can also hang food and trash at least 10 feet off the ground and 4 feet from the tree trunk.
- In developed campgrounds and picnic areas, a RGNF Special Order requires food storage in bear resistant methods.

Leave what you find:

- Take pictures, so others can enjoy the rocks, plants, and archaeological objects.
- Artifacts are protected under the Antiquities Act. Do not move or disturb artifacts. You can take a picture and report artifacts to the District Office.

Be responsible with fire:

- Always check for fire restrictions; fires or grills may not be allowed.
- Use existing fire rings where available.
- Consider using a camp stove instead of building a fire, especially in the backcountry.
- Build your fire in an area that is free of flammable vegetation and away from lakes and streams.
- Never leave your campfire unattended.
- Make sure to put the fire out completely before leaving the campsite or going to bed. Pour water on the fire and stir the ashes until they are cool to the touch.
- If it's too hot to touch, it's too hot to leave.
- Do not park on dry grass.
- Extinguish and dispose of cigarette butts.

How else can you help take care of your public lands and recreate responsibly?

- Learn more through Leave No Trace (lnt.org) and Stay the Trail (staythetrail.org).

Safety

Dead trees: Several insect outbreaks have killed many trees across the Forest. Please be aware that trees may fall at any time, especially on windy days. If you are planning on traveling Forest roads, be prepared by bringing a saw.

Elevation: The Rio Grande National Forest ranges in elevation from 8,000 feet to over 14,000 feet at the highest peaks. Staying or recreating at high elevations may lead to altitude sickness. Monitor yourself for symptoms and consult a healthcare professional if you feel unwell. UV rays at high elevations are stronger; use sun protection.

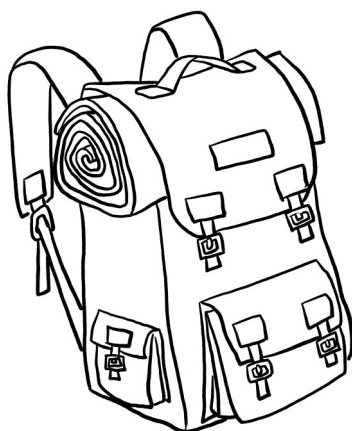
Road closures: Many Forest roads have seasonal closures from February to May. Most forest roads are not maintained in winter and are impassible to vehicles. Throughout the year, roads may be closed by a Special Order to protect the safety of visitors, staff, and the land.

Weather: Check the weather before you plan your trip at www.weather.gov. Weather can change quickly in the mountains; be prepared for thunderstorms in the summer monsoon season.

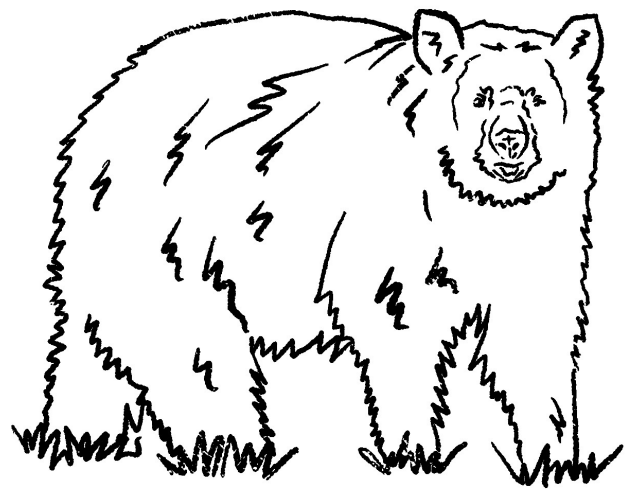
Bears: Remember you are in bear country. Please keep a clean camp and store all food, garbage, toiletries, and other bear attractants in bear resistant containers or using bear resistant methods. Storing bear attractants in a hard sided vehicle or building is acceptable.

What's in your pack?

Depending on what type of adventure you are planning to go on, you will need different things in your pack. A few essentials are listed that you should always carry in your pack!



- Map, and/or GPS or other navigation tools
- First aid kit
- Flashlight/headlamp
- Extra layers of clothes
- Extra water
- Extra food
- Sun protection
- An emergency shelter, knife, and fire starter are also good to have.



Quick Facts

- The Rio Grande National Forest (RGNF) is named because the 1,800 mile long Rio Grande River begins high up in the San Juan Mountains in the western most portion of the Forest.
- The Forest is divided into three different Districts: Saguache District to the north, Conejos Peak District to the south, and the central Divide District.
- The RGNF was established in 1908.
- The Continental Divide runs for 236 miles along most of the western border of the Forest.
- Blanca Peak is the highest point on the Forest at 14,345 feet above sea level.
- The Forest contains a myriad of ecosystems, from pinyon pine and juniper dotted foothills, to high elevation alpine tundra.
- The Forest surrounds the rural San Luis Valley, a large agricultural basin.
- Portions of four designated Wilderness areas, the La Garita, Sangre de Cristo, South San Juan, and Weminuche, are located within the RGNF.
- Temperatures in the summer peak out around 80 degrees and dip to well below zero during the winter months.
- Some parts of the San Juan Mountains average more than 400 inches of snowfall a year.
- The RGNF is located 3 1/2 hours south of Denver, CO and 3 1/2 hours north of Albuquerque, NM.

Recreation

From the Sangre de Cristos to the San Juan Mountains, the jagged peaks and rushing rivers of the Rio Grande National Forest wrap themselves around the San Luis Valley. Whether viewing the mountain scenery from roads or finding a challenge on trails, visitors can experience solitude and self-reliance through uncrowded year-round recreation opportunities.

We have listed a few suggestions for activities but there are many more to explore. Find more information about the trails and locations on the Rio Grande National Forest website or call or visit one of our offices.

Activities

Hiking: Hundreds of miles of hiking trails traverse the Forest. Explore four different Wilderness areas and countless ridges, passes, peaks, and valleys. Trail mileage is given as an out & back trip, not one way. Many hikes are long, but a shorter section of trail still makes for a great hike.

Bicycling: Mountain biking is permitted on Forest roads and trails outside of Wilderness. E-bikes are classified as a motorized vehicle and must stay on designated roads and trails as shown on the Motor Vehicle Use Map.

Horseback riding: Ride across the Forest and enjoy scenic views and picturesque camps. Horses and stock are allowed on most Forest trails. There are some designated areas to camp with your horses. Remember, weed free feed must be used on all National Forest lands.

Camping: The Forest has 33 campgrounds and several cabins available for rent. While many campgrounds are on a first-come, first-served basis, you can make reservations for some campgrounds. There are also many dispersed camping opportunities across the Forest. See page 12 for more camping information.

Vehicle travel: The Rio Grande National Forest manages over 2,000 miles of motorized roads and trails open to the public. All over-land motor vehicles are restricted to designated routes. If a road or trail is not listed on the Motor Vehicle Use Map, it is not designated for motorized travel. Please be aware of and observe all seasonal and Special Order closures.

Off-highway vehicles (OHV) operating on public lands must have a Colorado OHV registration or a Colorado non-resident permit. Registration permits are available through Colorado Parks and Wildlife or local vendors. All OHVs must be equipped with a USDA approved spark arrestor.



Fishing: There are many opportunities for fishing across the Forest; from small alpine lakes to quiet reservoirs and rushing creeks. Fishing licenses must be obtained through Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) or local vendors. Some waters are stocked by CPW. Waters vary in restrictions; check limits and regulations for lures and bait with CPW.

Hunting: The Rio Grande National Forest provides an abundance of habitat for deer, elk, and other game species. Wildlife management is an important part of the Forest Service's multiple use mission (see page 17). The RGNF manages the habitat utilized by these animals. Wildlife is managed on the RGNF in cooperation with CPW. Hunting is a wildlife management tool that is regulated by CPW.

CPW is responsible for establishing hunting rules and regulations. Information regarding seasons, bag limits, permit drawings, legal hours, and licenses may be obtained at all CPW offices and most sporting goods stores. The RGNF includes Game Management Units 681, 68, 76, 79, 80, 81, and 82.

Please refer to the Motor Vehicle Use Map for regulations on game retrieval.

Permitted outfitters can be found at www.coloradooutfitters.org.

Popular Recreation



	Bicycling	Hiking
Conejos Peak Ranger District	<p>Apache Canyon 117: Bike to the New Mexico border and beyond on this high elevation ride. It is about 6 miles round trip to the New Mexico border on Forest roads. Bikers can continue on Forest Road 87 or Forest Road 686 to bike on the Carson National Forest. Parking is available just off Hwy 17 on Forest Road 117.</p>  <p>Fox Creek Canyon 101: Ride a section of this Forest road as it climbs between the Fox Creek and Conejos River drainages. Start just off of Hwy 17 on Forest Road 101.</p>	<p>Red Lake Trail 733: This trail begins at the trailhead on Forest Road 114. The hike is about 6 miles out & back to Red Lake with a 800 ft elevation gain. There are great views of the Continental Divide, Elk Creek, and Los Pinos drainages.</p> <p>Ruybalid Trail 728: The hike to Ruybalid Lake is about 10 miles out & back with a 2,400 elevation gain. The trail is steep in the beginning. It begins at the Ruybalid Trailhead that is located just off of Forest Road 250.</p> <p>Tobacco Lake 719: Hike 4 miles out & back to Tobacco Lake with 850 ft elevation gain from Tobacco Lake Trailhead on Forest Road 105. This is also a popular access point to climb Conejos Peak.</p>
Divide Ranger District	<p>Deep Creek Trail 806: 16 miles out & back with a 2,800 ft elevation gain. This single track trail is popular for mountain biking. It can be biked out & back or just downhill with a shuttle. The Deep Creek Trailhead is located near Creede on County Road 550.</p> <p>Hunters Lake Road 430: Bike this dirt road out & back for 20+ miles from Big Meadows or Shaw Reservoir. The road is open to motorized vehicles.</p> <p>Embargo Road 640: In general, this road is in good condition for biking and portions of it would make a good e-bike ride. The road is also open to motorized vehicles.</p>	<p>Big Meadows Loop Trail 843: This is a 1.5 mile loop around the lake with very little elevation gain. It begins at Archuleta Trailhead near the Big Meadows boat ramp.</p> <p>Farmers Creek Trail 801: The trail is 15 miles out & back with a 2,000 ft elevation gain, but a shorter section makes a great hike. Farmers Creek Trailhead is located on Forest Road 500. This trail also accesses the Wheeler Geologic Area.</p> <p>Middle Frisco Trail 879: The hike to San Francisco lakes is 12.6 miles roundtrip with a 2,600 ft elevation gain. It begins at the Middle Frisco Trailhead off of County Road 13.</p>
Saguache Ranger District	<p>Historic Spanish Trail: The old Spanish Trail runs across the Saguache Ranger District. To ride the portion of the trail on the district, start at Old Cochetopa Pass and follow NN14 and 41G over Carnero Pass to La Garita.</p> <p>BLM Trails: There are many great mountain biking trails and roads lower in the valley on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands. These include trails in the Penitente Canyon Area and outside the town of Saguache.</p> <p>Raspberry Gulch 673, 678, 675: These Forest roads can be connected to make a 16.5 mile loop with about 2,500 ft of elevation gain. These roads follow several different creeks.</p>	<p>North Crestone Creek Trail 744: This trail has many different connecting trails. Hike to alpine lakes or over the divide to the San Isabel NF.</p> <p>Hot Springs Canyon Trail 753: This trail is about 8 miles out & back but any distance makes a nice hike. Start from the Hot Springs Trailhead off County Road 65.</p> <p>Middle Creek Trail 768: Hike up to 10.4 miles out & back with an 1,800 ft elevation gain. The trailhead is about 8 miles up Forest Road 870. This also makes a great horseback ride with ample parking at the trailhead.</p> 

Popular Recreation

Horseback Riding	Fishing
<p>South Fork Trail 724: Ride 10 or more miles out & back. There are several other trails that branch off of the South Fork Trail. The trail begins at the South Fork TH on Forest Road 250. There is lots of trailer parking.</p> <p>Elk Creek Trail 731: This trail is 15 miles long but is a nice ride for any distance. It is open to hikers and stock users as well as mountain bikers outside of Wilderness. The trail follows the Elk Creek drainage where there are opportunities for fishing and picnicking. There is ample parking in the area for trailers.</p> <p>Three Forks Trail 712: This trail provides access to several other trails as well as the Continental Divide Trail (CDNST). It starts at the Three Forks Trailhead where there is ample space for trucks and trailers.</p>	<p>Trujillo Reservoir: Located at the end of Forest Road 118, Trujillo Meadows is stocked and also a popular ice fishing location in winter, but the road is not plowed.</p> <p>Mix Lake: Mix Lake is located off of Forest Road 247 which branches off of Forest Road 250 below Stunner Pass. This lake has a campground near by and it is stocked by Colorado Parks and Wildlife.</p> <p>Platoro Reservoir: Platoro Reservoir is a large reservoir located off of Forest Road 247. There is a boat ramp near the dam. The reservoir is stocked by Colorado Parks and Wildlife.</p> <p>Conejos River: There are many access points to the Conejos River along Forest Road 250. There are also several campgrounds located along the river.</p>
<p>Grizzly Creek Trail 814: This trail follows Grizzly Creek and is 16 miles out & back with a 3,000 ft elevation gain. Use the stock trailhead just down the road from the Thirty Mile Campground.</p> <p>Wheeler Trail 790: This trail provides access to the Wheeler Geologic Area and is 15 miles out & back with a 3,000 ft elevation gain. The trailhead is located at Hanson's Mill on Forest Road 600.</p> <p>Ute Creek Trail 819: This trail is 26 miles out & back and there are a number of other trails that branch off. It is accessed from Lost Trail Trailhead on Forest Road 520.</p>	<p>Beaver Creek Reservoir: The reservoir is accessible year round and is stocked by CPW. There is a boat ramp, bathroom, and nearby camping. It is located off of Forest Road 360.</p> <p>North Clear Creek: This creek is accessed from North Clear Creek or Bristol Head Campgrounds.</p> <p>Upper Rio Grande River: There are multiple access points to the river from Forest Road 520.</p> <p>Pass Creek: Pass Creek starts near Wolf Creek Ski Area and flows along Hwy 160 to its confluence with the Rio Grande. There are several access points as well as fishing ponds off of Hwy 160.</p>
<p>Luders Creek Campground: Horse camping is allowed at this developed campground located on County Road NN14 near Old Cochetopa Pass. The campground provides access to the Colorado Trail and many Forest Roads.</p> <p>La Garita Wilderness: Numerous trails lead into beautiful high country near Saguache Park from the Middle Fork Trailhead and La Garita Trailhead. These trails are open to stock and hikers. Machin Lake is accessed by trail 783 from the Middle Fork Trailhead.</p> <p>Major Creek Trail 963, 751: The trailhead has plenty of parking and unloading space. The trail has some switchbacks in the first section that are challenging. There are also similar conditions riding from the Hot Springs/Garner Trailhead.</p>	<p>Mosquito Lake: This lake provides high mountain lake fishing. It is accessible by vehicle from Forest Road 861 near Bonanza.</p> <p>Carnero Creek: This small creek provides fishing along Forest Road 675 and near Poso Campground.</p> <p>Sangre de Cristo Range: Many lakes and streams in this range are accessible on foot. Many fish species exist in these creeks.</p> <p>Dome Lakes: While not on the Rio Grande National Forest, Dome Lakes is a popular fishing area near by on the Gunnison Ranger District.</p>



Popular Technical Drives & Rides

Conejos Peak Ranger District	<p>Elwood Pass 667: This road leaves Forest Road 250 and climbs over Elwood Pass and continues on to the San Juan National Forest. This road is rated as more difficult.</p> <p>Silver Mountain Trail 704: The trail is about 12 miles long. It can be accessed from Forest Road 271 or from the Alamosa Rock Trail 703. It is a scenic ride and passes through meadows, forests, and has sections above tree line. This trail is single track and open to motorcycles. It is rated as a moderate trail.</p> <p>Jasper to Blowout Pass 280: If you are looking for a more challenging drive or ride this steep road from Jasper to Blowout Pass is a good challenge. It is rated as most difficult.</p> 
Divide Ranger District	<p>Schrader Road and Trail 333, 934: Follow Shrader Road 333 until it turns into Trail 934. With a street legal bike, you can also ride Shady Trail 898 back to County Rd 14. Schrader Trail is single track and open to motorcycles. This is a moderate difficulty ride.</p> <p>Shady Trail 898: The trail runs from Forest Road 350 to 331 and can be accessed from either road or in the middle by Forest Road 345. ATVs 50 inches or less and motorcycles are the only types of motorized vehicles allowed on the Shady Trail. It is rated as a moderate to most difficult trail.</p> <p>Agua Ramon Area (600 #s): Explore and connect many different roads and tracks through this area. Access is through Forest Road 600, 610, or 630. Stay on designated routes. Most of these roads are open to all motorized vehicles but are recommended for UTVs and ATVs.</p> <p>Alder Road: Forest Road 610 is a great ride for an ATV or UTV. It is rough, rocky, and not recommended for regular 4x4 vehicles.</p> <p>Bristol Head: Drive Forest Road 532 to the top of Bristol Head Mountain where there are great views of the area surrounding Creede. This road is recommended for jeeps and other 4x4 high clearance vehicles. This road is rated as moderate.</p> <p>Stony Pass: Forest Road 520 connects the Creede area to the Silverton area. This popular road is accessible by passenger car up to Lost Trail CG. Beyond this point a 4x4 high clearance vehicle is needed. This road is rated as moderate, with loose rocky sections and deep ruts and is open to all motorized vehicles.</p> 
Saguache Ranger District	<p>Hayden Pass: Take County Road LL57 east from Villa Grove to Forest Road 970. This road travels over the Sangre de Cristo Mountains to the town of Coaldale on the Arkansas River. High clearance 4x4 vehicles are needed on this road and it is rated as a moderate to most difficult drive. The roughest side of the pass is the west side but the east side is more technical beyond Hayden Pass Campground.</p> <p>Bonanza Area: From Villa Grove, head west on County Rd LL56 to the historic mining town of Bonanza. Head up the old Otto Mears Toll Road (Forest Road 869) to the Rawley 12 Trailhead which has a picnic area and parking to unload OHVs. Explore the Bonanza Mines Off-Highway Vehicle Tour trails which continue over the Continental Divide and onto the San Isabel National Forest. The roads require 4x4 and high clearance vehicles and are best explored by ATV, UTV, or motorcycle.</p> <p>Forest Road 880 Loop: This road runs from just west of the town of Saguache up Findley Gulch and comes out on County Road LL56 near the town of Bonanza. This road has steep grades and is rated between moderate to more difficult. 4wd and high clearance is required on this loop.</p>

**Please refer to the MVUM for vehicle designations on Forest Roads.*

Popular Scenic Drives

Conejos Peak Ranger District	<p>Los Caminos Antiguos: Los Caminos Antiguos, 'The Ancient Roads,' is the best route to follow through the San Luis Valley. This was the northern outpost of sixteenth century Spanish territorial expansion. The byway was designated as a National Scenic Byway in February 2021 and follows paved State and County Roads.</p> <p>Platoro and Jasper: Drive Forest Road 250 through the Conejos River Canyon and Alamosa River Canyon. The road passes through the historic towns of Platoro and Jasper as well as by several fishable reservoirs. There are sections of private land along Forest Road 250, so ensure you are on the National Forest before accessing rivers and creeks. The road is passable in a passenger car; expect washboards and potholes.</p> <p>Forest Road 260: This road requires a 4 wheel drive vehicle with high clearance, but is not technical. This road connects the north and south sections of Forest Road 250.</p> <p>Stunner Pass: Drive up to Stunner Pass from the Platoro area on Forest Road 250 and then turn on to Forest Road 380. This road continues on to Summitville. It is a very scenic drive going over two mountain passes. Stop to learn more at the interpretive signs along the road. It is passable in a passenger car.</p>
Divide Ranger District	<p>Silver Thread Scenic Byway: Colorado's Silver Thread Scenic Byway weaves through stretches of remote and rugged landscapes and the historic districts of Lake City and Creede.</p> <p>Summitville: Take Forest Road 360, 380, or County Road 14 to Summitville. A loop can be made using any combination of these roads. These roads are generally passable in a passenger car. Expect washboards and potholes along these roads.</p> <p>Big Meadows, Shaw Lake, and Hunters Lake: Drive the length or part of the Forest Road 430 past several reservoirs and along a high mountain ridge. This drive is an out and back trip. The road is generally passable in a passenger car, at least to Hunters Lake.</p> <p>Lobo Overlook: The short drive up Forest Road 402 is accessible in a passenger car. Lobo Overlook sits on the Continental Divide and provides excellent views of the San Juan Mountains. This road is often one of the first to close and last to open.</p> <p>Beaver Creek Loop: Start from Forest Road 360 and turn on to 359 to climb and enjoy great views. Take Forest Road 332.1d back to 360 to make a scenic loop. This loop is an easier route for 4x4 jeep travel and is open to all motorized vehicles but not recommended for passenger vehicles.</p>
Saguache Ranger District	<p>County Road NN14 over Old Cochetopa Pass: Follow along the footsteps of Native Americans, explorers, and pioneers as you travel along the Old Spanish Trail. County Rd NN14 (Forest Road 750) is a gravel road generally drivable by passenger car.</p> <p>County Road 41G over Carnero Pass: Also known as the La Garita Road, this road is accessible by passenger car. Some sections to the north of Carnero Pass are a little rockier and rutted. Enjoy beautiful scenery and excellent wildlife viewing opportunities. This area hosts many fishing opportunities and is a popular hunting area.</p> <p>Highway 114: This paved road will take you from Saguache towards Gunnison. The present day road is a National Scenic Byway and follows a segment of the Old Spanish Trail that ran from Santa Fe, NM to Los Angeles, CA. Weather permitting, this is a good year round scenic drive. Wildlife is commonly sighted along this road.</p>



**Some roads have seasonal closures or may be closed or restricted by a Special Order.*

Winter Activities

Ski/Snowboard: Wolf Creek Ski Area is operated under a special use permit on the RGNF. Enjoy a day on the slopes at the ski area that boasts the most snow in Colorado.

Backcountry Ski/Snowboard: Travel under your own power through the mountains on ski or board to enjoy the quiet and scenic beauty of winter. The Forest has a lot of rugged terrain, so make sure you have a map and a clear plan to avoid avalanche hazards and terrain.



Cross Country Ski/Snowshoe: Take a ski or a snowshoe along Forest roads and trails in the winter. There are a few ski clubs that groom trails for skiing and snowshoeing. Road closures may exist to protect grooming for winter recreation.

Snowmobile: Several different clubs and organizations groom Forest roads for winter travel. There are some areas that are closed to over the snow motorized travel. Motorized travel is never allowed in Wilderness. Make sure you have done your research before you head out.

Avalanche Danger

The San Juan Mountains are infamous for their treacherous avalanche terrain. Know before you go! Make sure to do your research and have the appropriate gear and knowledge before you head out in winter, regardless of what activity you are doing. There are opportunities to take avalanche safety courses in this region of Colorado. For more information, visit the Colorado Avalanche Information Center (CAIC) website: www.avalanche.state.co.us



Know the Snow

Snow water equivalent (SWE) is the measurement of how much water is present in the snow. Knowing the SWE helps water and resource managers plan for water use and can help answer questions about current and future conditions.

- What are the avalanche conditions like now, and what might it mean for future conditions?
- What will the skiing or snowmobiling be like?
- How much will the rivers swell or even flood?
- How much will the reservoirs refill?
- How soon will remote mountain passes be accessible or snow free?
- What might the fire season look like?

Colorado typically gets light fluffy snow with a low SWE. This light snow makes for great powder skiing and riding but when it melts it doesn't provide as much water as wetter, denser snow of the Pacific Northwest.

In general, in Colorado, 12 inches of snow equals about 1 inch of water. Imagine a swimming pool filled up with 3 ft of snow over night. If it melted the next day there would only be 3 inches of water in the pool!



Popular Winter Recreation

Ski Area & Backcountry Ski/Snowboard	<p>Wolf Creek Ski Area: This is the only ski area that operates on the Rio Grande National Forest under a special use permit. The ski area sits along the Continental Divide and boasts the most snow in Colorado. It is located on Wolf Creek Pass on Hwy 160. The ski area also grooms several miles of Nordic trails.</p> <p>Wolf Creek Pass: There is usually a skin track up to the top of Lobo Lookout or the radio tower. There are numerous routes for descending from there. Over the snow motorized travel is only allowed on the Lobo Road 402. Other areas outside of Wolf Creek Ski Area are also popular for backcountry use including the Pass Creek area.</p> <p>East Bench: The East Bench area off County Road 550 near Creede provides some shorter backcountry runs as well as cross country skiing and snowshoeing opportunities. Parking is at the Deep Creek Trailhead or the East Bench Administrative Site.</p> <p>La Manga Pass: The La Manga Pass area off Hwy 17 provides areas for backcountry skiing, cross country skiing, and snowshoeing. Recreators can park along the highway and explore either side.</p>
Cross Country Ski & Snowshoe	<p>Big Meadows: There is a small parking area just off Hwy 160. The San Juan Nordic Club and South Fork Powder Busters Snowmobile Club regularly groom and put in ski tracks up to Big Meadows Reservoir and around the campground.</p> <p>Rock Creek: The San Juan Nordic Club maintains and grooms cross country ski trails in the Rock Creek area near the archery range. This area is accessible by County Road 28.</p> <p>Six Mile Flats: A loop trail with little elevation gain, hence its name, is groomed by the Upper Rio Grande Nordic Club. It begins near Marshall Park Campground at the intersection with Hwy 149 and Middle Creek Rd.</p> <p>The Saguache and Conejos Peak Districts do not have developed cross country ski areas but most roads on the district provide skiing or snowshoeing opportunities as conditions permit.</p>
Snowmobile	<p>Spring Creek Pass: Forest Roads and trails around Spring Creek pass provide many miles to ride. These trails are groomed and maintained by the Snow Country Explorers Club.</p> <p>Park Creek: Forest Road 380 provides access to many Forest roads and is a popular snowmobiling area. The road is often groomed by a local snowmobile club. Parking is just off Hwy 160 at the beginning of the Park Creek Road (Forest Road 380).</p> <p>Del Norte Peak Area: Forest Road 345 is usually a groomed snowmobile trail in winter, maintained by the South Fork Powder Busters Snowmobile Club. There are multiple loops on Forest Roads 350, 350.2B, 359, and beyond.</p> <p>Cumbres Pass and Apache Canyon: Both areas are located off of Highway 17. Parking areas are usually plowed along the side of the highway.</p> <p>Saguache District: While not groomed, the many snow covered Forest roads make for great rides in winter. There are locations along the highways for unloading.</p>

Remember, the Forest has many users. Practice good etiquette in the snow. This includes snowshoeing and snowmobiling to the side of groomed ski tracks, knowing who has the right of way, and being aware of others, especially in avalanche terrain.

Grooming occurs as weather permits; contact the clubs for more information. Clubs and organizations that groom operate under a special use permit.



Be prepared to travel in winter, most Forest roads are not plowed or maintained during the winter.

Overnights on the Forest

Campgrounds

The Forest has 33 campgrounds with over 650 individual sites. While many campgrounds are available on a first-come, first-served basis, you can make reservations at numerous sites. The majority of the campgrounds are operated by a concessionaire and some have on-site hosts. While electric, sewer, water hook-ups, and showers are not available, some campgrounds have potable water and all have toilets. Horses and stock are not permitted in developed campgrounds.

Campgrounds are generally open May-Sept. Some campgrounds are open year round but may have limited services or access. Campgrounds may be open but roads may be difficult to access or inaccessible. Check the campground guides, website, or contact the District office for more information.



Cabins

The Rio Grande National Forest offers ten rental cabins ranging from refurbished guard stations to historic log cabins located in remote areas. All cabins are available by reservation only. All cabins have a stove, a toilet or outhouse, fire ring, and a picnic table.

Reservations

Many of our Forest campgrounds are not reservable but operate on a first-come, first-served basis. To get a first-come, first-served site visit the campground to see if any sites are available. If a site is not occupied you may camp and pay any applicable fees. If there are no open sites, you will need to visit another campground.

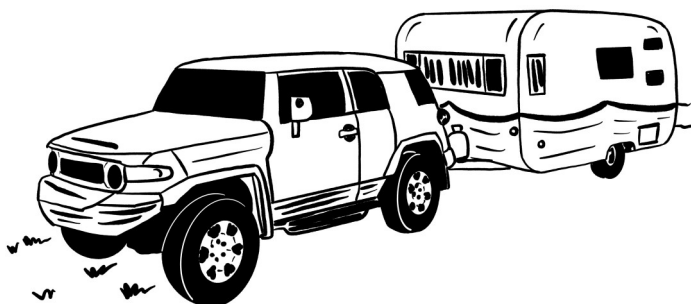
Reservations can be made up to 6 months in advance. Reservations must be made online at www.recreation.gov or by calling 877-444-6777.



Dispersed Camping

Often referred to as "boondocking," dispersed camping is camping outside of developed campgrounds on the Rio Grande National Forest. Dispersed camping is free and sites are not maintained, tracked, or reservable.











































































Pick up or download a Motor Vehicle Use Map to learn where dispersed camping is allowed. Remember, just because camping is allowed along a road does not mean there will be sites available or suitable for camping. Observe all posted signs and closures.



































































Cabins










	Name	Season*	General Info
Conejos Peak Ranger District	Elwood Cabin	Year-round	This small log cabin sleeps up to 6 people (two bunk beds). The cabin has a wood stove for heat, propane lighting, and stove.
	Platoro Cabin 1	July - September	This cabin sleeps up to 6 people (two bunkbeds), no dogs. It has propane lighting, stove, refrigerator, and running water.
	Platoro Cabin 2	July - September	This accessible cabin has a combination kitchen/living room, bedroom, and bathroom. It sleeps up to 6 people (two bunkbeds), no dogs. It has a propane heater, stove, refrigerator, and lighting as well as running water. The cabin has entry ramps and the kitchen and bathroom are wheelchair accessible.
	Alamosa Guard Station	May - October	This cabin is expected to open in late 2023. This cabin sleeps up to 8 people. It has a divided kitchen and living room area with a gas refrigerator, electrical lighting, and USB outlets.
Divide Ranger District	Fitton Cabin	May - September	This small, rustic cabin sleeps four (two bunk beds). There is a barn for horses, and a small, covered porch. There is no potable water. Natural sources of water should be treated before use. The cabin is accessed by Trail 873 (open to <50 inch motorized vehicle, foot, horse, or bike). Not directly accessible by vehicle.
	Off Cow Cabin	May - September	This small, rustic cabin sleeps four (two bunk beds). There is no potable water. Natural sources of water should be treated before use. The cabin has a horse barn and pasture for horses. The cabin is accessed by Trail 873 (open to <50 inch motorized vehicle, foot, horse, or bike). Not directly accessible by vehicle.
	Alder Guard Station	June - September	This rustic cabin has electricity, running water, two bunkbeds, and one single bed. There is a wood stove in the guard station (wood and splitting maul provided) and several picnic tables outside.
Saguache Ranger District	Stone Cellar Guard Station	April - November	This cabin sleeps up to 12 people (four bunk beds). The cabin has a propane refrigerator and heater. There is no electricity at the guard station. Water is available at an outside hand pump.
	Carnero Guard Station	April - November	This small cabin sleeps up to 12 people (four bunk beds). The cabin has a propane refrigerator, heater, and lighting. Water is available at an outside hand pump.
	Upper Crossing Guard Station	Year-round	This cabin includes electricity, a refrigerator, heat, and inside running water. It sleeps up to 9 people with three bunk beds with twin beds on the top and fold-out full beds below.
	Brewery Creek Guard Station	April - November	This cabin sleeps up to 9 people (three bunkbeds). The cabin has a stove, refrigerator, and heater, all powered with propane. The guard station does not have electricity. Water is available from an outside hand pump.
	Duncan Cabin	May - October	This cabin is expected to open in 2023. This one room cabin sleeps 4-6 people and is heated by wood. The cabin is accessible from the Liberty Trailhead, where you will have to hike approximately 4 miles to reach your destination.
*Season is approximate and may vary year to year			

Campgrounds

	Name	Season*	General Info
Divide Ranger District	Big Meadows	Memorial Day to Labor Day	 60 ft    R23  G
	Bristol Head	Memorial Day to Labor Day	 50 ft  
	Cathedral	Year-round	 45 ft   
	Comstock	Year-round	 40 ft  
	Cross Creek	Year-round	 25 ft   
	Highway Springs	Memorial Day to Labor Day	 35 ft 
	Ivy Creek	Year-round	 25 ft  
	Lost Trail	Year-round	 35 ft 
	Lower Beaver Creek	Year-round	 45 ft  
	Marshall Park	Memorial Day to Labor Day	 40 ft  R10 
	North Clear Creek	Memorial Day to Labor Day	 40 ft  
	Palisade	Year-round	 35 ft    
	Park Creek	Memorial Day to Labor Day	 35 ft   
	Rio Grande	Year-round	 25 ft   
	River Hill	Memorial Day to Labor Day	 55 ft   R13 
	Road Canyon	Year-round	 50 ft  
	Rock Creek	Year-round	 35 ft  
	Silver Thread	Year-round	 45 ft  
	Thirty Mile	Year-round	 40 ft    R28 
	Tucker Ponds	Memorial Day to Labor Day	 40 ft   
	Upper Beaver Creek	Year-round	 35 ft   

Campgrounds

	Name	Season*	General Info
Saguache Ranger District	Buffalo Pass	May to November	  
	Luders Creek	May to November	  
	North Crestone Creek	May to November	  
	Poso	May to November	  
	Storm King	May to November	  
	Stone Cellar	May to November	  
Conejos Peak Ranger District	Alamosa	Year-round	   
	Aspen Glade	Memorial Day to Labor Day	    
	Conejos	Memorial Day to Labor Day	   
	Elk Creek	Memorial Day to Labor Day	    
	Lake Fork	Memorial Day to Labor Day	    
	Mix Lake	Memorial Day to Labor Day	   
	Mogote	Memorial Day to Labor Day	     
	Spectacle Lake	Memorial Day to Labor Day	    
	Stunner	May to October	   
	Trujillo Meadows	Memorial Day to Labor Day	   

	No fee, all other campgrounds have a fee
	Reservable on www.recreation.gov
	Number of sites
	Handicap accessible
	Maximum spur length
	Water
	Forest Service managed campground
	Near a recreational body of water
	Group sites available

General Campground Information

Check out: 11am Check in: 2pm

Generator hours: 6am to 10pm

Site Capacity: up to 8 people, 2-3 tents and tents must fit within established camping pad, vehicles and trailers must fit on spur length.

Stay Limit: There is a 14 day stay limit within a 30 day period for all camping on the Rio Grande NF.

Dogs: Dogs must be on a leash in the campground.

*Season is approximate.

Points of Interest

North Clear Creek Falls

This scenic overlook is situated along the Silverthread Scenic Byway on Hwy 149. It offers a restroom, picnic tables, a large parking area, and interpretive signs. It has an accessible trail to an overlook of the falls.

Bachelor Loop

This 17-mile self-guided driving tour loops through Creede's historic mining district and ghost towns. The tour's first interpretive stop is just north of Creede in Willow Creek Canyon at the junction of East and West Willow Creeks. The loop can be driven in either direction and all wheel drive is recommended.

Wheeler Geologic Area

Wheeler Geologic Area is part of the La Garita Wilderness. Within this area you will find many trails, nearby peaks over 13,000 ft, and amazing views. Volcanic tuff, a type of rock, eroded into many different spires, shapes, and gullies. Wheeler is accessible by a 15-mile round trip hike or a very long and rough 4x4, high clearance road. There are no bathrooms at Wheeler Geologic Area and camping is not allowed in the Area; be prepared.

Bonanza

Adventure through history in the once thriving mining town of Bonanza. Take County Road LL56 west from Villa Grove. The County maintained gravel road is passable by passenger car through the town, but some of the scenic places beyond will require good tires and high clearance.

Fourteeners

The RGNF hosts eight '14ers,' peaks above 14,000 ft, all within the Sangre de Cristo range. These include Blanca Peak (14,345), Crestone Peak (14,294), Crestone Needle (14,197), Kit Carson Peak (14,167), Challenger Point (14,086), Humboldt Peak (14,068), Ellingwood Point (14,042), and Little Bear Peak (14,037). Most of these peaks do not have maintained trails to the top and are not for the faint of heart. Most routes to the peaks require route finding, have sections with high exposure, and some are technical ascents. Mistakes on these peaks have led to life-threatening situations.

La Garita Caldera

The entire area to the west and southwest of Saguache was once the location of one of the largest volcanoes in North America. For a geologist, amateur or professional, the area is a wealth of geological interest. Incredible rock formations can be found throughout the area including Chimney Rock in Saguache Park, and Hellgate Canyon along County Road 41G.



Cumbres and La Manga Passes

Cumbres Pass reaches an elevation of 10,022 ft and La Manga Pass reaches 10,249 ft as Hwy 17 traverses the southern San Juan Mountains. Both passes are a stop along one of America's Scenic Byways and crossed by the Cumbres and Toltec Scenic Railroad.

Platoro

Platoro is an old mining town and now remote summer destination surrounded by the Rio Grande National Forest. Its located along Forest Road 250 and hosts a wealth of outdoor activities in the surrounding area. The name Platoro comes from the combination of the Spanish words *plata* meaning silver and *oro* meaning gold.

Trujillo Meadows Reservoir

The reservoir hosts a range of activities from paddling a kayak to fishing from shore or boat. There is a campground nearby and user made trails around the shore of the lake for fishing access.

Land of Many Uses

National Forest lands are managed under the Multiple Use-Sustained Yield Act to ensure all the various renewable resources are utilized in the combination that provides the greatest good for the greatest amount of people. This means there may be many activities going on across the Forest - from recreation to grazing livestock, logging, firewood cutting, and mining, as well as managing habitat for fish and wildlife.

How many uses can you see in this picture?

Color me in!



Range

Livestock grazing has been permitted on Forest Service lands since 1934 and is part of the Forest Service's multiple use mission. These lands provide a workplace for ranchers and vast open spaces for recreation use. Grazing supports the local economy and the historic ranching heritage of Colorado.

The Rio Grande National Forest uses grazing as a land management tool across 581,000 acres. Local ranchers hold grazing permits and pay to graze their livestock. Ranchers are permitted to graze in set areas called allotments. Each allotment is divided into pastures that the livestock are rotated through during summer months to ensure proper utilization.

Timber

The forests of the Rio Grande are managed for a variety of objectives, from wildlife habitat and fuels reduction to commercial harvest for timber production. Forest management is actively managing forests using scientifically grounded practices to achieve specific outcomes. Tree planting, logging, and monitoring are often associated with forest management activities on the Rio Grande.

Timber sales on the Forest must be assessed and meet regulations so that renewable resources can be sustainably utilized. Forest products contribute to the local and regional economies and communities. Removing any timber or forest products requires prior authorization.

Rio Grande Crossword

ACROSS

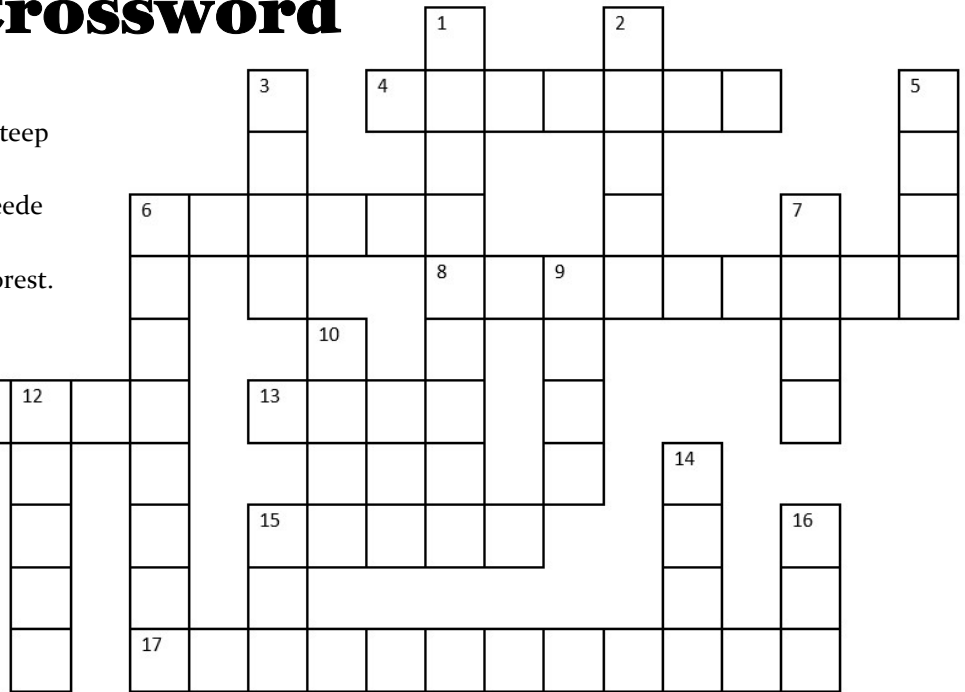
4. A native animal with horns that likes steep mountain sides.
6. A job that brought many people to Creede hoping to strike it rich.
8. A place where water is stored on the forest.
11. It is important to ___ on the trail or roads to help protect soil and plants.
13. In the summer months thunderstorms bring ___ and hail to the mountains.
15. A tree with white bark and leaves that turn yellow in the fall.
17. The insect that killed many of the trees on the forest.

DOWN

1. The name of the major river that starts on the National Forest.
2. The largest ungulate (animal with hoofs) on the forest.
3. This animal is a member of the cat family and is adapted to cold, snowy winters.
5. When you put out your campfire you first drown it, then you ___ it, and finally feel it to see if it is still hot.

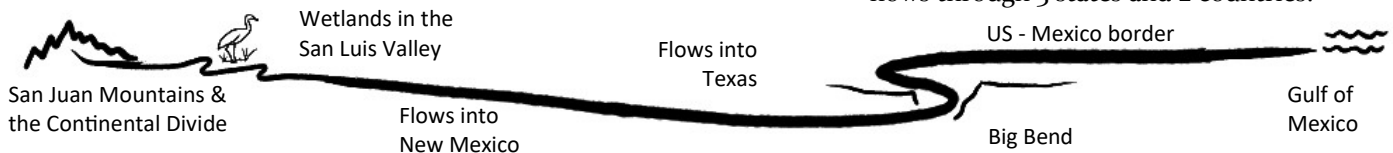
6. Many different activities happen on National Forests. They are the lands of ___ _____. (2 words)
7. A domestic animal you may find grazing on the forest.
9. In the spring and summer this melts to feed the creeks and rivers.
10. Wolf Creek _____ and Stony _____ are places you can go over the mountains on a road. (1 word)

12. The Rio Grande cutthroat _____ is a fish only found in this area.
14. Where a bird lays its eggs.
15. Trees create oxygen which we need when we breathe _____.
16. The Rio Grande National Forest is the homeland of this indigenous tribe.



The Headwaters of a Great River

The headwaters of Rio Grande are here on the Rio Grande National Forest. This river flows through 3 states and 2 countries.



Special Orders

The Rio Grande National Forest often needs to provide for public safety or reduce chances for the degradation of natural resources under special circumstances that are not covered by existing Forest laws. In those situations, supplemental laws, called "Special Orders," enact prohibitions that address the specific area of concern or activity.

During office hours, we will be happy to provide you with a printed copy of any of the Special Orders you may be interested in. Please ask our one of our Visitor Information Specialists.

To view all Special Orders currently on the Rio Grande National Forest, visit:
www.fs.usda.gov/goto/riogrande/specialorders



**Rio Grande National
Forest Special Orders**

Passes & Permits

The Rio Grande National Forest is open, free of charge, for your use and enjoyment. Fees may be charged and permits required for some activities and developed locations. Businesses permitted to operate on the RGNF may provide services, such as campground concessionaires, outfitters, and guides.

- **Recreation Passes** - Interagency Recreation Passes provide free entrance to many Federal recreation sites and sometimes provide a discount for certain recreation fees.
 - **Forest Product Permits** - Stop by a District Office to pick up or purchase a permit and learn the requirements for collecting forest products such as Christmas trees, firewood, transplant trees, pinecones, plants, mushrooms, and more.
- Firewood is a popular forest product. It is sold by the cord and a permit is required to take it off the Forest. If you are collecting a small amount of firewood for your camp and not removing it from the Forest, a permit is not needed.
- **Event, Commercial, Special Use, & Outfitter-Guide Permits** - Permits are required for certain individual and commercial activities that occur on the Forest.

Looking for a guide or service? To obtain an outfitter, guide, or other services from commercial companies who operate through Forest Service permits, please contact them directly.



Fire Conditions

Fire Weather

Check the weather for the area you are visiting at www.weather.gov. Pay attention to Red Flag Warnings and fire restrictions.

A Red Flag Warning is issued when strong winds and dry fuels create conditions that lead to fires having an increased resistance to control. Campfires are discouraged on windy days and during a Red Flag Warning because embers can blow out of the fire ring and start a wildfire.

Fire Prevention Tips

Do not throw cigarettes or matches out of a moving vehicle. They may ignite dry grass on the side of the road and become a wildfire.

Never leave a fire unattended. Extinguish fires before going to bed or leaving.

Extinguish all outdoor fires properly. If it is too hot to touch it is too hot to leave.

- **Drown** fires with plenty of water
- **Stir** to mix coals and water
- **Feel** to make sure everything is cold to the touch.

Dirt will not fully extinguish a fire.

Dunk charcoal in water until cold.

To report a fire: Dial 911 or contact the Pueblo Interagency Fire Dispatch Center: (719) 553-1600

Smokey Bear's Best Campfire Soup Recipe



Ingredients:

- Campfire
- Shovel
- Lots of water



Directions:

1. Add water to your campfire until it looks like soup.
2. Use your shovel to stir the water and ashes together. Mix well. Don't forget to get the ashes deep down!
3. When its all mixed, feel your campfire soup with the back of your hand. (Don't taste it!) If it is still warm you need to repeat steps 1 and 2!
4. Double check your campfire soup. When it is cold enough to touch, it is cold enough to leave.

Geology

The Rio Grande National Forest includes some unique and fascinating geology. The mountains and valleys have seen drastic changes over time; from intense volcanic activity to the slow deposition of sediments that created new rock. Mountains were built through uplifts and worn down by glaciers.

Evidence of volcanic activity is visible in the calderas and rock formations throughout the Forest. A caldera is the remnants of a collapsed volcano. Looking south from the hills above Creede you can see a dome ringed by a moat-like valley; this is the Creede Caldera. The center high point is what is left of the core of an ancient volcano.

The La Garita Caldera is one of the largest calderas, and was one of the largest eruptions in the world. It was a supervolcano that erupted 28 million years ago and produced about 1,200 cubic miles of ash that is now known as the Fish Canyon tuff. For comparison the Mount St. Helens eruption in 1980 produced 0.25 cubic miles of ash. The La Garita eruption spread the ash over 9,000 square miles in a layer 100-650 feet thick.

The La Garita Caldera is at least 25 miles wide but is not as clearly visible as the Creede Caldera. The moat that surrounded the La Garita Caldera has been filled in by other volcanic rocks and later volcanic eruptions.

The vast amount of volcanic activity in the area led to rich mineral deposits within the rocks of the San Juan Mountains. These deposits spurred the many mining booms of the area, giving rise to towns like Summitville, Platoro, Creede, and Bonanza.

The Sangre de Cristo Range was formed through uplift rather than volcanism. These mountains rise straight out of the valley with no foothills. There are major fault lines running on both sides of the mountains. The Sangre De Cristos were pushed up about 5 million years ago and this uplift was accompanied by many earthquakes.

Glaciation further sculpted the mountains on the RGNF. Glacial features including u-shaped valleys, moraines, and other deposits of glacial sediments that may be visible to the trained eye but are not as prominent as they may be in other ranges or areas.

Leave No Trace

How can you take care of the Forest and lands you are visiting? By following the Leave No Trace principles when you visit the Rio Grande National Forest! Fill in the words to complete each Leave No Trace principle. Then use the numbers that match each letter to solve the riddle below.

1. a plan and be .
15 8 11 4 1 5 5 7 16 10 4 16 8 10 4 7

2. Stay on the .
2 10 8 3 19

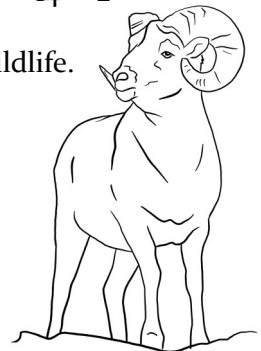
3. Pack it in, it .
16 8 18 11 5 14 2

4. Leave what you .
9 3 20 7

5. wildlife.
10 4 13 16 4 18 2

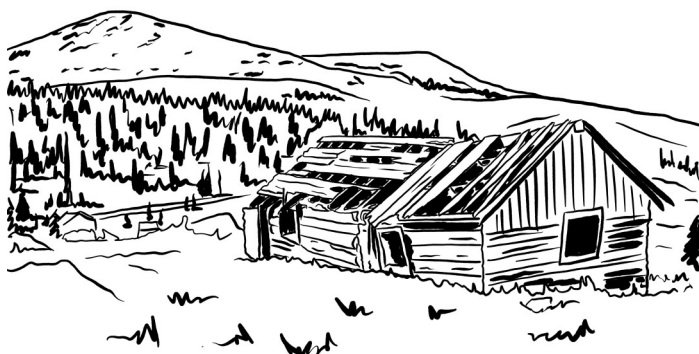
6. be careful with .
8 19 12 8 17 13 9 3 10 4

7. Be to other .
11 3 20 7 21 3 13 3 2 5 10 13



What has but ?
20 5 9 3 20 1 4 10 13 15 8 20 17 10 3 20 1 13

A !
2 10 4 4



History

The area comprising the San Luis Valley and Rio Grande National Forest (RGNF) has a rich and diverse history.

Native American Paleo-Indian cultures, beginning with the Clovis and Folsom Complexes (11,000 years ago) were the first known inhabitants of the area. These, the following cultures of the Archaic Stage, and the Ute Indians lived by hunting animals and gathering native plants found in the area. The San Luis Valley and surrounding mountains are the homeland of multiple tribes including the Nuu-ah-tav-pu (Ute), Pueblo Nations, Diné Bikéyah (Navajo), and Jicarilla Apache.

The Spanish explored the San Luis Valley area during the late 1500's. In an attempt to get people to settle the area, Mexico established numerous land grants within the Spanish territory. The valley remained largely unsettled until the area became a territory of the United States in 1850.

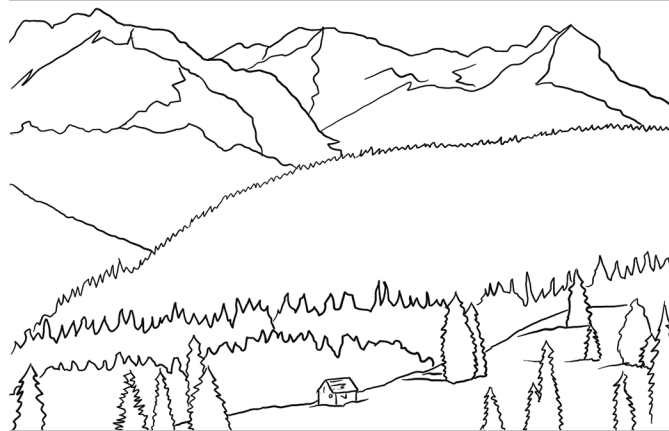
The first permanent settlement in Colorado, known as San Luis de la Culebra, was established in 1851 on the Rio Culebra River on the Sangre de Cristo Land Grant. La Loma de San Jose, near present day Del Norte, was first inhabited in 1859 by Hispanic families who left the Santa Fe area. Irrigation ditches

were constructed, and farms established. More extensive farming activities began in the 1880s near Hooper and the area near Monte Vista, where large-scale irrigation systems were built.

Gold and silver were discovered near Summitville in 1870 which began the mining rush to the area. Other mining settlements followed at Bonanza, Creede, and along the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. Del Norte, one of Colorado's earliest cities, established in 1872, served as a supply point for the mining camps.

In 1891, an Act of Congress authorized the establishment of Timber Reserves in order to conserve the nation's timber, range, and water resources. Portions of these established reserves were combined to form the RGNF in 1908. Since the establishment of the RGNF, the Forest has been used for, and continues to be used for timber, grazing, recreation, hunting, mining, and more.

Please Remember: Context is everything when it comes to archaeology, so please do not move, disturb, collect, or otherwise modify in any way, archaeological remains. This includes, but is not limited to arrow heads, spear points, pottery sherds, stone tools, glass beads, bones, historic glass bottles and cans, and historic structural remains.



Spruce Beetle

Why are there so many dead trees?

You will see many dead trees on the Forest. Over the last 20 years spruce beetles killed these trees in an epidemic. Spruce beetles are native to Colorado.

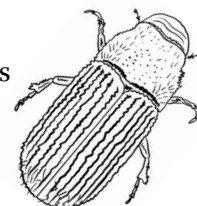
What will happen to the dead trees?

Some people cut the dead trees for firewood, other trees are cut down to make lumber. Many dead trees are homes for woodpeckers, insects, squirrels, and other animals. Some trees will fall, then rot and turn into soil. Look closely, there are still many younger trees growing in the forest.

How does the spruce beetle kill the trees?

The spruce beetle lays eggs under the bark in the part of the tree that makes wood on the inside and bark on the outside. When the eggs hatch, the larvae eat the tree phloem (sap). When the majority of the tree bark is damaged, it will die.

Sometimes the beetles also bring in fungus. When the beetles make holes in the tree it is like breaking the tree's skin, so the tree is more susceptible to infection.



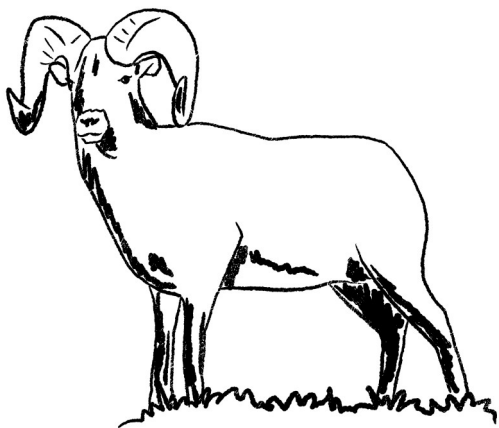
Wildlife

From creeks in the valleys to forested mountainsides, and from grassy meadows to the rocky peaks, there is a diversity of wildlife on the Rio Grande NF. Share your wildlife sightings on the iNaturalist app to help biologists in their work! Remember, do not feed wildlife as human food can make them sick and wildlife may carry diseases.

Mammals

Ground Squirrels: There are many little critters you may see while visiting the Forest. Golden mantled ground squirrels, least chipmunks, and Colorado chipmunks frequent campsites. Golden mantled ground squirrels can be differentiated from the chipmunks because they are a little bigger and do not have stripes on their face.

Big Game: The Forest is also home to many larger mammals, including five species of ungulates, (hoofed animals). Deer and elk roam across the Forest from high elevations in the summer to lower areas in winter. Bighorn sheep prefer steeper, rockier terrain and moose prefer willowed areas. Pronghorn, the fastest land mammal in North America, are found at lower elevations in open areas.



Birds

At night, listen for owls. At lower elevations in ponderosa or Douglas fir stands you may hear a flammulated owl and at higher elevations in spruce-fir forests you may hear a boreal owl.

At high elevations above the tree line, you might spot a well camouflaged white tailed ptarmigan or get a glimpse of a golden eagle soaring high above.

Common birds you may see around camp include juncos, hermit thrushes, and several species of corvids (crow family), including Canada jays, Steller's jays, and Clark's nutcrackers. The Merlin Bird ID app is a great tool to help identify and track your sightings!

Rio Grande Cutthroat Trout

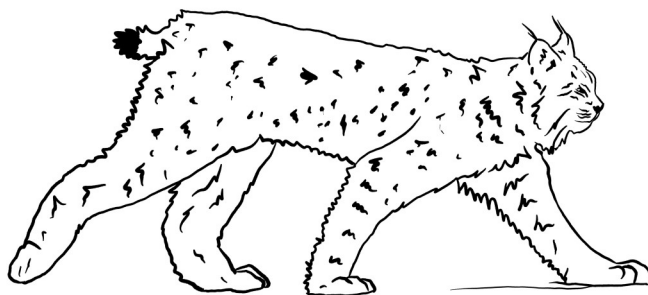
The Rio Grande cutthroat trout is one of many subspecies of cutthroat throughout the West, but is the only native trout found on the Forest.

Insects

Our biologists are monitoring two rare insects on the Forest. At high elevations, the white veined arctic butterfly is a rare find and across the Forest, the western bumblebee is also of interest. There are many different bee species, all of which are important pollinators but very difficult to tell apart!

Amphibians

Amphibians inhabit the wetter meadows, ponds, and forests. Chorus frogs and barred tiger salamanders are found throughout the Forest. The boreal toad is rare and listed as an endangered species in Colorado. Many partners are working to monitor and improve habitat for boreal toads on the Forest and across the state.



Return of the Snow Cats

Lynx are a wild cat that loves to live in cold, snowy areas like our mountains here in Colorado. They have big paws to help them walk on top of snow, like snowshoes! Lynx were trapped for fur and their habitat was fragmented until they were locally extinct. Many people and organizations then worked to bring this species back. Lynx were caught in Canada and reintroduced in Colorado. Today lynx are rare, but their reintroduction was a success.

Wilderness

Wilderness may mean many things, including wild places, but Wilderness with a capital 'W' is a designation of land that receives the highest level of protection. Wilderness areas are designated by Congress on federal public lands. These protected Wilderness areas safeguard land for current and future generations to enjoy, as well as provide clean water, air, wildlife habitat, and more.

Weminuche

The Weminuche Wilderness (pronounced wem-in-ooch) is the largest Wilderness area in Colorado at 499,771 acres. It spans the Continental Divide, with its headwaters diverted to both the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. The Weminuche is rugged country, but its ecosystems are fragile.

Heavy winter snow and summer thunderstorms provide an abundance of water leading to spectacular wildflower displays.

Sangre de Cristo

The Sangre de Cristo Wilderness is managed by the Forest Service and the National Park Service.

Unlike most of Colorado's mountains, the high and rugged Sangre de Cristos were uplifted suddenly, creating a steeper, more jagged range. Four Fourteeners (peaks above 14,000) are clumped together in the midsection of the Wilderness. Melting snow feeds many creeks and small lakes, and nourishes a forest of oak, aspen, and spruce.

South San Juan Wilderness

The South San Juan Wilderness encompasses the southeastern extent of the San Juan Mountain Range, including a segment of the Continental Divide.

Volcanic activity followed by carving glaciers created the rough terrain of the remote Wilderness. You'll find high peaks, jagged pinnacles, and ragged ridges interspersed with lakes draining into turbulent creeks. The Conejos, San Juan, and Blanco Rivers all have their headwaters here.

La Garita

La Garita means 'lookout' in Spanish, and this Wilderness amply deserves the name. From the summit of its single fourteener, San Luis Peak, climbers can gaze across the upper Rio Grande Valley and down the San Luis Valley.

About 35 miles of the Continental Divide lie well above a sprawling forestland that provides habitat for elk and mule deer. This is a land of rushing streams and broad subalpine meadows that hold tremendous mountain beauty.



Flora

Throughout the summer you can enjoy many species of spectacular wildflowers. Scarlet gilia, paintbrush, and many species of asters bloom in reds, oranges, and yellows. Penstemons, larkspur, columbine, and lupine fill meadows with purples and blues. In wetter areas, marsh marigold, globe flowers, and elephant's head bloom. High in the alpine, look for the tiny flowers of moss campion, phlox, and alpine forget-me-nots.

Wildflower season peaks in the high country in mid-July, but often continues into early September in the subalpine forests.

Numerous shrubs can be found - from sage at lower elevations to currants and roses in forested areas. Willows are one of the few shrubs that grows above tree line.

Tree species range from pinon pine and juniper in the foothills to ponderosa pine and Douglas fir in the mid-elevations. Aspen stands also thrive in the mid-elevations, especially where there is a little more moisture. At higher elevations, the forest transitions into Engelmann spruce and subalpine fir. Subalpine fir will grow all the way to tree line, becoming more gnarled and dwarfed at the highest elevations.

About the Area & the Forest

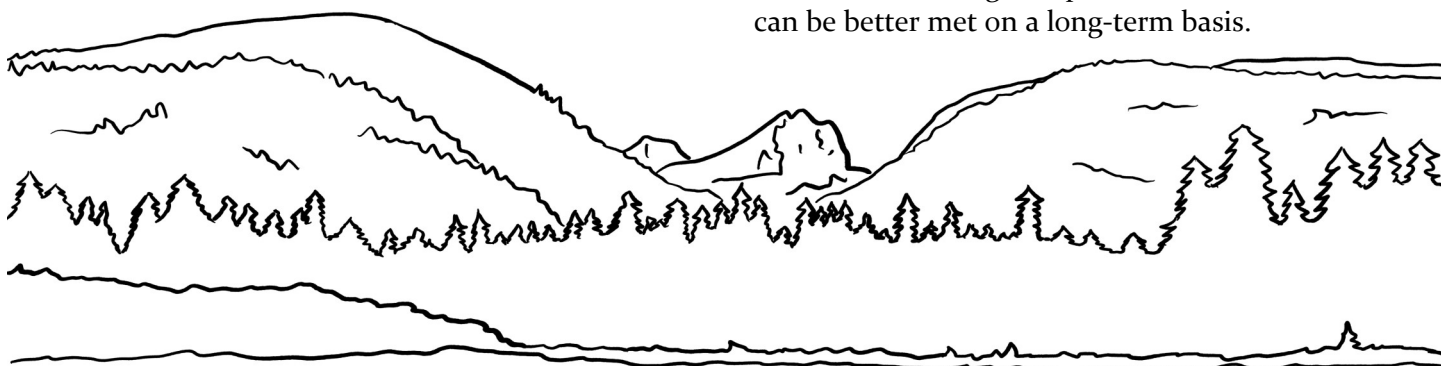
The fifth largest river in the U.S., the Rio Grande, begins its 1,800 mile journey to the Gulf of Mexico high up in the San Juan Mountains in the western most part of the Forest. The Continental Divide runs for 236 miles along most of the western border of the Forest and the jagged tops of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains form the eastern border. In between these two mountain ranges sits the San Luis Valley, a large agricultural alpine valley.

The Rio Grande National Forest is composed of a myriad of ecosystems ranging from high elevation desert at 7,600 feet above sea level to rocky crags at over 14,300 feet in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. Portions of four Wilderness Areas make up almost a quarter of the Forest.

President Theodore Roosevelt established the Rio Grande National Forest by Presidential Proclamation in 1908.

The Rio Grande, like others in the 191 million acre National Forest System, is administered by the Forest Service under the U.S. Department of Agriculture, for a variety of uses and values. You may see uses such as cattle or sheep grazing, fishing, firewood cutting, camping, hiking, and even mining. The RGNF is also managed for fish and wildlife habitat, water resources, and to provide recreational opportunities.

The Forest Service strives to maintain a balanced pattern of land use under the multiple use principle. In this manner, no single use dominates the Forest and the wide range of public and individual needs can be better met on a long-term basis.



We acknowledge and are proud of the fact that the Rio Grande NF is situated within the ancestral lands of the Nuu-ahga-tuvu-pu (Ute), Diné Bikéyah (Navajo), Jicarilla Apache, and multiple Pueblo Nations.

Contact Us

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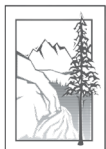
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***San Juan Mountains
Association***

EXPLORE ♦ LEARN ♦ PROTECT

This guide was created in partnership with the San Juan Mountains Association and Rio Grande National Forest. Learn more about SJMA at sjma.org.

All illustrations by Alanna Herrera.

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